

Library Advisory Board Minutes: November 14, 2023For Multnomah County Library Advisory Board

The Multnomah County Library Advisory Board (LAB) met virtually on Tuesday, November 14, 2023. The meeting began at 5:03 pm.

Board members present were: Clare Wilkinson, Cassie Duprey, Danielle Pacifico-Cogan, David Jarvis, Domiè Newton, Gabie Mbenza-Ngoma, Hazel Burke, Jade Chan, Kate Fleming, Kelsey Fong, Lizzie Martinez, Madison Riethman, Megan Parrott, Nikia Kae Solbjor, and Taryn Sauer.

Kristi Ketchum and Mabel Reed were unavailable.

Staff members present were: Annie Lewis, deputy director, Dave Ratliff, integrated services director; Katie Shifley, finance and facilities manager; Maddelyn High, management analyst; and Sonja Ervin, equity and inclusion manager.

WELCOME & CHECK-IN

Meeting attendees joined the virtual meeting either via video or phone and participated in a warm-up exercise in virtual breakout rooms.

BOARD BUSINESS

Meeting minutes for the October 10, 2023 meeting were approved.

UPDATES FROM LIBRARY LEADERSHIP

Library Deputy Director Annie Lewis shared highlights from the Director's Report, noting that library staff are very busy with and focused on building projects, since all major bond projects are now active. Lewis thanked those who were able to tour the library's new Operations Center on November 7 to see what this new space will mean in terms of efficiencies for the library system. Lewis expressed gratitude to Integrated Services Director Dave Ratliff and Finance & Facilities Manager Katie Shifley specifically for their work to get the Operations Center up and running. Reopening dates for the next couple of bond site locations are being determined now.

Lewis also shared that the library (and the county) are in the midst of budget season, planning and preparing to put together Fiscal Year 2025 budgets.

This month, MCL is also celebrating Native American Heritage Month, and Lewis highlighted some program offerings listed in the Director's Report.

Several LAB members who were able to attend the tour of the Operations Center expressed thanks, noting that the tour showed how many moving parts materials management involves.

Lewis shared gratitude to Clare Wilkinson for working on a sourcing effort for an organizational development consultant who will support staffing for new buildings; and Wilkinson noted that this was the first time a LAB member has been involved in something like this, and that she hopes this involvement will continue as needed.

Equity at MCL

Library Equity & Inclusion Manager Sonja Ervin (she/her) joined and introduced herself and the work of her team at the library. Ervin reiterated MCL's 2023-2025 values, which were developed to ensure that those who have been left out are centered in the library's work.

Building off of the warm-up questions (*what is your family's history with libraries*), Ervin noted that one of the reasons we need to do outreach to communities that haven't been served well is that we know that libraries have a history of not being welcoming for all. This is also why staff representation in library spaces matters.

Ervin shared terms and definitions as they relate to equity work, and offered background information on the history of othering and segregation in libraries. Ervin offered examples of how past historical exclusion and family experiences influence intergenerational patterns of behavior (library use) today. We are still in a place of imbalance, and Ervin underscored the importance of understanding how systems were created and how institutions are still influenced by external oppressive systems. Ervin offered current systems context to illustrate equity work that still needs advancement, giving examples at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels of how we might jam the gears of oppression as they relate to libraries.

Meeting attendees broke into small groups to discuss what they think MCL's role is in slowing the gears of institutional oppression, racism, and exclusion. After discussion, small groups came back together and shared key points and take-aways from their discussion, including:

- The importance of recognizing and accounting for intersectional identities, and that certain forms of dominant whiteness are better served (white, cis-gendered, able-bodied males)
- Libraries as foundational public access spaces that allow for and encourage cross-cultural interactions and general community building
- How can MCL be a voice at public policy tables (around hot-button social issues like houselessness, for example), and how LAB might help support that
- MCL has recently dedicated more resources to community engagement, but has a ways to go in terms of improving the community feedback loop. One way we can put a finger in the gear is to make sure we're listening to communities and evolving systems.
- (Noting the impact of simultaneous bond-related closures of several libraries in high-need areas) How do we make libraries places that are intentionally designed around communities? Especially for groups who have valid reasons for developing mistrust, how do we go about inviting folks in and creating a sense of belonging in new library spaces?
- How seeing staff members, materials, and programs geared toward their culture and identity is notably felt.

Ervin thanked folks for their willingness to share, and expressed gratitude for the commitment and emotional labor of library staff working to move equity work forward. Lewis echoed this,

sharing that Ervin's leadership has made a measurable and impactful difference at MCL.

LAB members discussed re-igniting an equity committee, and Ervin offered to support an equity committee if one is created. High asked LAB members who are interested to email her so she can support planning.

ACTION ITEMS + CLOSING

LAB liaison Maddelyn High reminded that the December LAB meeting will be focused on a budget basics training, and asked folks to send any particular questions they might have about the budget process ahead of time.

The meeting adjourned at 6:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:
Maddelyn High, director's assistant
Multnomah County Library, Oregon